

(Washington, DC) - Today, U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-4), a member of the House Education and Labor Committee, voted to reinvigorate the Head Start program and to help millions of the nation's children arrive in kindergarten ready to succeed. The conference report for the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act (H.R. 1429) passed by a vote of 381 to 36. It would improve teacher and classroom quality, strengthen Head Start's focus on school readiness, and expand access to Head Start for more children. The legislation includes an amendment offered by Congressman Altmire to address the unique challenges faced by Head Start programs in rural areas.

**"Families in the rural parts of my district - Beaver, Lawrence, Mercer, and Butler Counties' often face significant challenges because of the distances they must travel in order to obtain crucial social services, including access to Head Start programs,"** said Congressman Altmire.

**"My amendment breaks down some of these barriers by making transportation, health screenings and home visit services more accessible to rural families."**

According to a recent report from the National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services, the "main challenges to rural Head Start programs centered upon transportation, programmatic requirements, access to appropriate health and oral health care, and enrollment fluctuations." Congressman Altmire's amendment would direct the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop improved models of professional development for rural staff and to remove barriers in rural communities that will help increase parental involvement, home visit services, and health screenings for Head Start participants. The amendment was endorsed by the National Education Association.

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act would:

- Improve teacher and classroom quality by requiring half of teachers nationwide to hold a bachelors degree by 2013, directing 60 percent of new funds be used for quality improvements, and ensuring that classroom staff members receive better training to meet the needs of children with disabilities;
- Increase accountability by requiring programs failing to provide a high quality early education program to recompete for their grants and allowing the Secretary of Health and Human Services to quickly terminate bad programs; and,
- Strengthen comprehensive services for families of Head Start children by placing greater emphasis on early identification of child and family mental health needs.

**Congressman Altmire added, &quot;Since 1965, Head Start has helped 20 million children arrive in kindergarten with the tools necessary to succeed in school and in life. Previous sessions of Congress had failed to reauthorize Head Start since 2003, but we were able to work in a bipartisan way to advance this long overdue legislation. This bill builds on Head Start's proven record of success by closing the achievement gap, combating poverty by expanding access to more children and continuing to provide a strong curriculum, as well as health and nutritional services. I am proud to support this bill which will help ensure a healthy and bright future for Pennsylvania's children and their families.&quot;**